TURKISH SOF TRAIN AZERBAIJANI FORCES

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Azerbaijani military units recently initiated artillery attacks on Armenian defensive positions near the town of Fizuli while simultaneously conducting local raids along other sectors of the forward lines. These renewed combat operations on the perimeters of the Nagorno-Karabakh oblast resulted in some unexpected tactical successes against Armenian-held positions and ended a long series of frustrating losses for the Azeris. Their former failures, characterized by operational and tactical-level incompetence, appear to have been somewhat mitigated both by recent training provided by Turkish special operations officers and the rumored appearance of Afghan Mujahedin. Pakistani mercenaries may also have been involved. Despite these small gains, any significant victories for Azeri forces in the near term can be safely ruled out. The Armenian forces within Nagorno-Karabakh continue to occupy the most favorable terrain and retain decisive advantages in military leadership, organization, and motivation. Furthermore, political unity within Azerbaijan is lacking. The six-year struggle has already ruined the careers of many Azeri politicians and they are reluctant to authorize decisive action for fear of losing major battles. The long-term implications of this local conflict, however, remain dangerous. Fighting, to date, has largely been confined to Azerbaijan and Armenia; but the competing interests of Turkey and an increasingly resurgent Russia could result in a broader regional confrontation. In the past, fighting in this area has also caused Iran to deploy troops (commandos and conventional infantry) on its northern border ostensibly to protect its territory from the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.